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CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Notes on the contributors</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Chronology</i>	xvii
1 Introduction: the Gothic in western culture JERROLD E. HOGLE	I
2 The genesis of “Gothic” fiction E. J. CLERY	21
3 The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic ROBERT MILES	41
4 French and German Gothic: the beginnings TERRY HALE	63
5 Gothic fictions and Romantic writing in Britain MICHAEL GAMER	85
6 Scottish and Irish Gothic DAVID PUNTER	105
7 English Gothic theatre JEFFREY N. COX	125
8 The Victorian Gothic in English novels and stories, 1830–1880 ALISON MILBANK	145
9 The rise of American Gothic ERIC SAVOY	167

CONTENTS

10	British Gothic fiction, 1885–1930 KELLY HURLEY	189
11	The Gothic on screen MISHA KAVKA	209
12	Colonial and postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean LIZABETH PARAVISINI-GEBERT	229
13	The contemporary Gothic: why we need it STEVEN BRUHM	259
14	Aftergothic: consumption, machines, and black holes FRED BOTTING	277
	<i>Guide to further reading</i>	301
	<i>Filmography</i>	311
	<i>Index</i>	313

FIGURES

1	Publication of Gothic novels, 1770–1800	<i>page</i> 43
2	Publication of English Gothic novels in French translation, 1767–1828	70

I

JERROLD E. HOGLE

Introduction: the Gothic in western culture

Gothic fiction is hardly “Gothic” at all. It is an entirely post-medieval and even post-Renaissance phenomenon. Even though several long-standing literary forms combined in its initial renderings – from ancient prose and verse romances to Shakespearean tragedy *and* comedy – the first published work to call itself “A Gothic Story” was a counterfeit medieval tale published long after the Middle Ages: Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, printed under a pseudonym in England in 1764 and reissued in 1765 in a second edition with a new preface which openly advocated a “blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern,” the former “all imagination and improbability” and the latter governed by the “rules of probability” connected with “common life” (p. 9). The vogue that Walpole began was imitated only sporadically over the next few decades, both in prose fiction and theatrical drama. But it exploded in the 1790s (the decade Walpole died) throughout the British Isles, on the continent of Europe, and briefly in the new United States, particularly for a female readership, so much so that it remained a popular, if controversial, literary mode throughout what we still call the Romantic period in European literature (the 1790s through the early 1830s), now especially well known as the era of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818).

This highly unstable genre then scattered its ingredients into various modes, among them aspects of the more realistic Victorian novel.¹ Yet it also reasserted itself across the nineteenth century in flamboyant plays and scattered operas, short stories or fantastic tales for magazines and newspapers, “sensation” novels for women and the literate working class, portions of poetry or painting, and substantial resurgences of full-fledged Gothic novels – all of which were satirized for their excesses, as they had also been in Romantic times, now that the Gothic mode had become relatively familiar.² Like the 1790s, the 1890s, still known today as the *fin de siècle*, then saw a concentrated resurgence of Gothic fiction, particularly in prose narrative, highlighted by such now-classic “Gothics” as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture*

of *Dorian Gray* (1890–91), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Bram Stoker’s original *Dracula* (1897), and Henry James’s serialized novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The 1900s finally saw the Gothic expand across the widest range in its history, into films, myriad ghost stories, a vast strand of women’s romance novels, television shows and series, romantic and satirical musical (as well as nonmusical) plays, and computerized games and music videos, not to mention ongoing attempts at serious fiction with many Gothic elements. The late twentieth century has even seen a burgeoning in the academic *study* of Gothic fiction at college and university levels and in publications connected to them. There is now no question that the Gothic, particularly in prose or verse narrative, theatre, and film – all of which we here encompass in the phrase “Gothic fiction” – has become a long-lasting and major, albeit widely variable, symbolic realm in modern and even postmodern western culture, however archaic the Gothic label may make it seem.

Our objectives here are to explain the reasons for the persistence of the Gothic across modern history and how and why so many changes and variations have occurred in this curious mode over 250 years. One difficulty in doing so, of course, is how pliable and malleable this type of fiction-making has proven to be, stemming as it does from an uneasy conflation of genres, styles, and conflicted cultural concerns from its outset. Nevertheless, given how relatively constant some of its features are, we can specify some general parameters by which fictions can be identified as primarily or substantially Gothic.³ Though not always as obviously as in *The Castle of Otranto* or *Dracula*, a Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory. Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story.

These hauntings can take many forms, but they frequently assume the features of ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death) that rise from within the antiquated space, or sometimes invade it from alien realms, to manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view. It is at this level that Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural – at

least somewhat as Walpole urged such stories to do – often siding with one of these over the other in the end, but usually raising the possibility that the boundaries between these may have been crossed, at least psychologically but also physically or both. This oscillation can range across a continuum between what have come to be called the “terror Gothic” on the one hand and the “horror Gothic” on the other.⁴ The first of these holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past, while the latter confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences.

The readership or audience of all such Gothics began as and remains mostly middle-class and Anglo, though more kinds of audiences (postcolonial, African-American, American Indian, and Latin American, for example) have been drawn in over the years. Given that fact, Gothic fictions since Walpole have most often been about aspiring but middling, or sometimes upper middle-class, white people caught between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests (or figures with such aspirations) and forces of change that would reject such a past yet still remain held by aspects of it (including desires for aristocratic or superhuman powers). This tug-of-war affects central characters and readers alike, frequently drawing them toward what is initially “unconscious” in at least two different senses. It can force them, first, to confront what is psychologically buried in individuals or groups, including their fears of the mental unconscious itself and the desires from the past now buried in that forgotten location. After all, several features of the Gothic, especially as practiced in the mid-nineteenth century by Edgar Allan Poe in America and the *romans frénétiques* (or “frenetic novels”) in France,⁵ eventually became a basis for Sigmund Freud’s *fin de siècle* sense of the unconscious as a deep repository of very old, infantile, and repressed memories or impulses, the archaic underworld of the self.

At the same time, the conflicted positions of central Gothic characters can reveal them as haunted by a second “unconscious” of deep-seated social and historical dilemmas, often of many types at once, that become more fearsome the more characters and readers attempt to cover them up or reconcile them symbolically without resolving them fundamentally. The title character in the original *Frankenstein*, for example, finds that his sexless fabrication of an artificial creature, ultimately his “monster,” from pieces of bodies in graveyards and charnel houses confronts him with two kinds of unconscious: his own preconscious dreams of reembracing, even as he

recoils from the body of his dead mother (his psychic unconscious; Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 85), and the choices simmering at the subliminal levels of his culture (in his *political* unconscious) between the attractions of old alchemy and modern biochemistry, strictly biological and emergent mechanical reproduction, the centrality and marginality of women, and middle-class scientific aims set against the rise of a “monstrous” urban working class upon which bourgeois aspiration is increasingly dependent.⁶ It is no wonder that the late twentieth-century effulgence in teaching and writing about Gothic fictions has been dominated either by psychoanalytic readings of such creations or by Marxist, new historicist, or cultural studies assessments that find many class-based, ideological, and even technological conflicts of particular historical times underlying the spectral or monstrous manifestations in Gothic works from several different eras. As this book will often show, therefore, the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century.

In general, these deep fears and longings in western readers that the Gothic both symbolizes and disguises in “romantic” and exaggerated forms have been ones that so *contradict* each other, and in such intermingled ways, that only extreme fictions of this kind can seem to resolve them or even confront them. As E. J. Clery and Robert Miles recall in this volume, the early Gothic (or really fake *neo*-Gothic) for Walpole and his most immediate successors sees its characters and readers as torn between the enticing call of aristocratic wealth and sensuous Catholic splendor, beckoning back toward the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, on the one hand, and a desire to overthrow these past orders of authority in favor of a quasi-equality associated with the rising middle-class ideology of the self as self-made, on the other – but an ideology haunted by the Protestant bourgeois desire to *attain* the power of the older orders that the middle class wants to dethrone. Such a paradoxical state of longing in much of the post-Renaissance western psyche fears retribution from all the extremes it tries to encompass, especially from remnants of those very old heights of dominance which the middle class now strives to grasp and displace at the same time. As a result, in the words of Leslie Fiedler,

the guilt which underlies [much early, Romantic, and even American] gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been trying to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church

Introduction

and State, the West has opened a way for the intrusion of darkness: for [cultural and individual] insanity and the [consequent] disintegration of the self.

(Fiedler, "Invention of the American Gothic," p. 129)

Here is why, Fiedler and others have shown, the features of the Anglo-European-American Gothic have helped to prefigure and shape Freud's notion of Oedipal conflict in the middle-class family. In some way the Gothic is usually about some "son" both wanting to kill and striving to be the "father" and thus feeling fearful and guilty about what he most desires, all of which applies as well to Gothic *heroines* who seek both to appease and to free themselves from the excesses of male and patriarchal dominance in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783–85), Ann Radcliffe's romances of the 1790s, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and many "female Gothics" thereafter.⁷ Beneath this tangle of contradictions, moreover, is the deeper lingering fear for readers of the Gothic that Fiedler recognizes: the terror or possible horror that the ruination of older powers will haunt us all, not just with our desires for them, but with the fact that what "grounds" them, and now their usurpers, is really a deathly chaos. Beneath his quest to manufacture life, after all, Victor Frankenstein confronts a desire to reunite with his dead mother and somehow engender artificial life from her and his biological decay. Through the Gothic, we remind ourselves, albeit in disguise, that something like a return to the confusion and loss of identity in being half-inside and half-outside the mother, and thus neither entirely dead nor clearly alive, may await us behind any old foundation, paternal or otherwise, on which we try, by breaking it up, to build a brave new world (see Kahane, "Gothic Mirror" and Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*).

This pattern of hyperbolically verbalizing contradictory fears and desires over a possible "base" of chaos and death, and in a blatantly fictional style, remains a consistent element in the Gothic even as the terms and features of this combination change with the transformations of western society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the time of *Frankenstein*, the many dilemmas for its hero stem from alterations in the anatomical, electrical, and chemical sciences *and* the acceleration of an industrial revolution that may lead to the greater mechanization of life *and* the concomitant rise of a homeless urban working class displaced from the land by the creations of the bourgeois economy *and* the concern that an expanding British Empire may bring Anglos face to face with the very racial others (like the multicolored creature) that are supposed to be kept distant from "us" even while we depend on them economically (see Malchow, *Gothic Images*, pp. 9–40). Even so, the intermixed transitions of this era, where each cultural position seems capable of blurring into its opposite *and* some others besides, become embodied

in, even scapegoated on, the half-alive/half-dead, half-organic/half-artificial, and obscurely desirable/obviously repellant specter/creature. He/it locates and focuses our longings and fears as though they are *and are not* ours, allowing them to be visible as part of our present fearfully threatening us and yet making them either a relic of the decaying past or perhaps the avatar of a mechanistic or racially other future. Such a Gothic construction, altered from Walpole's but not leaving his oversized and stalking ghosts behind altogether, conflates the major changes in modes of cultural production by 1818 *and* the contradictory hopes and fears that these arouse in white middle-class readers while permitting that same audience either to face or to avoid these multiple implications, all in a fiction as sewn together from different types of previous writing as the creature is fabricated from different portions and classes of older bodies (see Hogle, "*Frankenstein*").

The Gothic has lasted as it has because its symbolic mechanisms, particularly its haunting and frightening specters, have permitted us to cast many anomalies in our modern conditions, even as these change, over onto antiquated or at least haunted spaces and highly anomalous creatures. This way our contradictions can be confronted by, yet removed from us into, the seemingly unreal, the alien, the ancient, and the grotesque. Some Gothic tales, such as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*, have a lasting resonance of this kind, so much so that we keep telling them over and over again with different elements but certain constant features. Such recastings help us both deal with newly ascendant cultural and psychological contradictions and still provide us with a recurring method for shaping and obscuring our fears and forbidden desires.

The Gothic, in other words, provides the best-known examples of those strange and ghostly figures that Freud saw as examples of "the Uncanny" (or *Unheimlich*) in his 1919 essay of that name. For him what is quintessentially "uncanny," as he reveals most by analyzing a German Gothic tale, "The Sandman" (1817) by E. T. A. Hoffman, is the deeply and internally familiar (the most infantile of our desires or fears) as it reappears to us in seemingly external, repellant, and *unfamiliar* forms. What is most familiar to Freud, to be sure, are strictly psychological or visceral drives from our earliest existence, such as sheer repetition-compulsions and the castration anxiety born of desiring the mother and thus risking the wrath of the father (which some Gothic tales do indeed include). But the devices he isolates for rendering the symbolic disguises of such drives in fiction can also be employed, as *Frankenstein* has revealed, for configuring quite familiar and basic social contradictions engulfing middle-class individuals who must nevertheless define themselves in relation to these anomalies, often using creatures or similarly *othered* beings to incarnate such mixed and irresolvable foundations of being.

Introduction

Since Freud and partly in line with his kind of psychoanalysis, the French theorist and therapist Julia Kristeva has gone on more recently in her book *Powers of Horror* (1980) to see the return of the repressed familiar in “the uncanny” as based on a more fundamental human impulse that also helps us to define the cultural, as well as psychological, impulses most basic to the Gothic. Kristeva argues for ghosts or grotesques, so explicitly created to embody contradictions, as instances of what she calls the “abject” and products of “abjection,” which she derives from the literal meanings of *ab-ject*: “throwing off” and “being thrown under.” What we “throw off,” she suggests, is all that is “in-between . . . ambiguous . . . composite” in our beings, the fundamental inconsistencies that prevent us from declaring a coherent and independent identity to ourselves and others (p. 4). The most primordial version of this “in-between” is the multiplicity we viscerally remember from the moment of birth, at which we were both inside and outside of the mother and thus both alive and not yet in existence (in that sense *dead*). It is this “immemorial violence” that lies at the base of our beings and is one basis of the primal chaos calling us back, yet it is that morass from which we always feel we must “become separated in order to be” a definable person (p. 10).

Whatever threatens us with anything like this betwixt-and-between, even dead-and-alive, condition, Kristeva concludes, is what we throw off or “abject” into defamiliarized manifestations, which we henceforth fear and desire because they both threaten to reengulf us and promise to return us to our primal origins. Those othered figures reveal this deeply familiar foundation while “throwing it under” the cover of an outcast monster more vaguely archaic and filled with contradictions than supposedly normal human beings, as in the cadaverous creature of *Frankenstein*, the aristocratic vampire in *Dracula*, or the shrunken and gnarled other-self-*in-the-self* of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886; see Hogle, “The Struggle”). By these means all that is abjected is thrown under in another fashion: cast off into a figure or figures criminalized or condemned by people in authority and thus subjected to (again, thrown under) their gaze and the patterns of social normalcy they enforce. The process of *abjection*, then, is as thoroughly social and cultural as it is personal. It encourages middle-class people in the west, as we see in many of the lead characters in Gothic fictions, to deal with the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence by throwing them off onto ghostly or monstrous counterparts that then seem “uncanny” in their unfamiliar familiarity while also conveying overtones of the archaic and the alien in their grotesque mixture of elements viewed as incompatible by established standards of normality. The Gothic is the form of western fiction-making, from novels to films to videos (witness Michael Jackson’s

Thriller of 1982), where such symbolic “abjection” most frequently occurs precisely because its highly mixed form allows both the pursuit of sanctioned “identities” and a simultaneously fearful and attractive confrontation with the “thrown off” anomalies that are actually basic to the construction of a western middle-class self.

One reason the Gothic as a form symbolizes this process of abjection so well is its cross-generic status from the start and its resulting combination of “high culture” and “low culture” throughout its varied history. When Walpole proposed blending “two kinds of romance,” he was referring in part to his own cross between medieval chivalric romances and neoclassic tragedies oriented toward the old aristocracy, on the one hand, and the newly ascendant bourgeois novel (or so it was later called) directed in its comic elements and probabilities of common existence toward the increasingly dominant middle classes, on the other. His choice of the Gothic label for this uneasy marriage, while not widely adopted as rapidly as some have supposed, was therefore a marketing device designed to fix a generic position for an interplay of what was widely thought to be high cultural writing (epic, verse romance, tragedy) with what many still regarded as low by comparison (servant-based comedy, superstitious folklore, middle-class prose fiction). The most immediate result was a tortured mixture in Walpole’s text and those of his earliest imitators, such as Clara Reeve in *The Old English Baron* (1777–78), whereby characters – and thus readers – were torn between “traditional signs of identity . . . based on social rank and blood lines” and the refashioning of themselves, as well as fiction, to suit “the vagaries of exchange value . . . associated with capitalist-class imperatives and the growing strength of the market economy” (Henderson, “‘An Embarrassing Subject,’” p. 226).

By 1797, when Samuel Taylor Coleridge reviewed Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), for many the archetype of the horror Gothic then and since, “the multitude of the manufacturers” of the “horrible and the preternatural” for the broad “public taste” by this time – clearly an attack on the “lowness” of romances targeted at the widest popular market – has become associated with both an oxymoronic, class-mixing style (“phrases the most trite and colloquial” applied to exalted subjects requiring “sternness and solemnity of diction”) and a “level[ing]” of “all events . . . into one common mass” where events from different spheres of existence “become almost equally probable” (Coleridge in Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents*, pp. 185–87). The Gothic has thus become the subject of intense debate, which continues today, over its blurring of metaphysical, natural, religious, class,

economic, marketing, generic, stylistic, and moral lines. This debate has had great influence, as Michael Gamer, Jeffrey Cox, Misha Kavka, and Steven Bruhm show in this book, over how counter-Gothic as well as admittedly Gothic writers, dramatists, or filmmakers have incorporated or altered the most established features of the Walpolean and Radcliffean romance over the last 200 years. In the meantime the Gothic has also come to deal, as one of its principal subjects, with how the middle class dissociates from itself, and then fears, the extremes of what surrounds it: the very high or the decadently aristocratic and the very low or the animalistic, working-class, underfinanced, sexually deviant, childish, or carnivalesque, all sides of which have been abjected at once into figures ranging from Lewis's monk Ambrosio and Radcliffe's class-climbing villains to the title character in C. R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, Wilde's Dorian Gray, Stoker's Count Dracula, and the carnival-magician "Opera Ghost" hidden in the depths of a palace of high culture in Gaston Leroux's original *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (1910; see Wolf, *Essential Phantom of the Opera*). Still classified for many as betwixt and between "serious" and "popular" literature and drama, the Gothic is thus continuously about confrontations between the low and the high, even as the ideologies and ingredients of these change. It is about its own blurring of different levels of discourse while it is also concerned with the interpenetration of other opposed conditions – including life/death, natural/supernatural, ancient/modern, realistic/artificial, and unconscious/conscious – along with the abjection of these crossings into haunting and supposedly deviant "others" that therefore attract and terrify middle-class characters and readers.

Concurrently, too, as feminist critics of this mode have seen for decades now, the Gothic has long confronted the cultural problem of gender distinctions, including what they mean for western structures of power and how boundaries between the genders might be questioned to undermine or reorient those structures. Even as early as *The Castle of Otranto* – and certainly in Walpole's Gothic play *The Mysterious Mother* (composed in 1768 but never staged before the author died) – women are the figures most fearfully trapped between contradictory pressures and impulses. It is *Otranto's* Isabella who first finds herself in what has since become the most classic Gothic circumstance: caught in "a labyrinth of darkness" full of "cloisters" underground and anxiously hesitant about what course to take there, fearing the pursuit of a domineering and lascivious patriarch who wants to use her womb as a repository for seed that may help him preserve his property and wealth, on the one hand, yet worried that, fleeing in an opposite direction, she is still "within reach of somebody [male], she knew not whom," on the other

(p. 28). From the start, then, the oppression and “othering” of the female seen from her point of view has been a principal Gothic subject, even to the point of depicting her reduced to an object of exchange or the merest tool of child-bearing between men (see Sedgwick, *Between Men*). Hence it is hardly surprising that the Gothic attained its first great effulgence in the hands of Ann Radcliffe, the most popular English woman novelist of the 1790s. Female readership was increasing by leaps and bounds in the middle classes from the 1760s on, so she and her many imitators had great encouragement to develop the primal Gothic scene of a woman confined and turn it into a journey of women coming into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency, albeit within a still-antiquated and male-dominated world full of terrors for every female.

Even more striking, though, is the frequent goal of that journey in the Gothic, even for Walpole: the recovery of a lost or hidden maternal origin by both women and men. In this motif a patriarchal lineage and house turns out to be explicitly dependent on and rooted in the unpredictable possibilities of a forgotten, but finally uncovered, womanhood (see Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, pp. 114–15, and Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho*, pp. 638–49). The confinement of woman by patriarchy in a great deal of Gothic, we ultimately find, is based fundamentally on an attempt to repress, as well as a quest to uncover, a potentially “unruly female principle” (Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p. 86) that antiquated patriarchal enclosures have been designed to contain and even bury, as in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839). The Gothic often shows its readers that the anomalous foundations they seek to abject have become culturally associated with the otherness of femininity, a *maternal* multiplicity basic to us all (see Kahane, “Gothic Mirror”). Social gender divisions have been designed to deny, even as they make us desire, this boundary-blurring source of ourselves that initially stems, the Gothic reveals, from the body of a woman. Here is the reason, a key factor in the history of the Gothic, why Kristeva can link horrifying abjection with our throwing off of the memory that we have archaically been both inside and outside the mother whom we now fear and desire at the same time. The Gothic is quite consistently about the connection of abject monster figures to the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal; Victor Frankenstein not only seeks his mother’s dissolving body through the construction of his male monster, but shows his greatest fear and commits his strongest act of repression by feverishly destroying the female creature that his first creation has asked him to make (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 163–64). It is woman whom he has avoided most in his onanistic creation because it is the ultimate uncontrollability of the life-giving female that most crystallizes all of his many fears and abjections.

Some historians of the Gothic have made sharp distinctions between works of female Gothic (in the sublimated terror vein of Radcliffe) and male Gothic (in the graphic horror tradition of “Monk” Lewis; see Williams, *Art of Darkness*, pp. 99–158), and there is some accuracy in these categories, particularly when we note the vast twentieth-century market for feminine Gothic romances (see Radway, *Reading the Romance*) epitomized by the highly Radcliffean *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, the source of the Oscar-winning David O. Selznick/Alfred Hitchcock film of 1940. Yet even male-oriented Gothic works, such as *Frankenstein* but also *Dracula* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, are bedeviled by the threat of and longing for the deeply maternal abyss of nonidentity that ultimately beckons to all the characters, especially the heroes. Jonathan Harker in Stoker’s novel is most aroused and horrified deep in Dracula’s castle by the multiple bevy of female vampires who threaten to seduce, drain, and thereby unman him (*Dracula*, pp. 41–44), while Leroux’s original phantom cannot build his subterranean lair of music rooms and carnivalesque halls of mirrors under the Paris Opera without centering it around a *petit bourgeois* bedroom fashioned to duplicate exactly the *boudoir* of his mother, possibly the site of his own conception and now the location for him to which all things in the Opera must descend – and regress (Wolf, *Essential Phantom of the Opera*, pp. 174–75, 316–18). The repressed, archaic, and thus deeply unconscious Feminine is a fundamental level of being to which most Gothic finally refers, often in displacements of it that seem to be old patriarchal structures, and all the blurred oppositions that are abjected onto monsters or specters by Gothic characters face their ultimate dissolution into primal chaos as they approach this feminized nadir that is both the ultimate Other and the basically groundless ground of the self.

The greatest horror in the Gothic, however, is not simply the pull of the masculine back toward an overpowering femininity. The deep Feminine level, as the Gothic mode has developed, is but one major form of a primordial dissolution that can obscure the boundaries between all western oppositions, not just masculine–feminine or the other pairs already noted. The reason that Gothic others or spaces can abject myriad cultural and psychological contradictions, and thereby confront us with those anomalies in disguise, is because those spectral characters, images, and settings harbor the hidden reality that oppositions of all kinds cannot maintain their separations, that each “lesser term” is contained in its counterpart and that difference really arises by standing against *and* relating to interdependency. While *high* versus *low* and *serious* versus *popular* tend to blur in the malleable Gothic genre, so do all of the cultural distinctions it takes on thematically, whether these are based on gender, sexual orientation, race, class,

stages of growth, level of existence, or even species. The original Dracula, for instance, can disgorge blood from his breasts as much as he can penetrate flesh with his phallic teeth (Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 247); can be attracted by Jonathan Harker (and vice versa) as much as Mina Murray (p. 31); can be western and eastern simultaneously in his whiter-than-white visage linked to “aquiline” stereotypes of the Jew in the 1890s (pp. 23–24); can be extremely aristocratic and cavort among homeless gypsies (p. 45), threatening the stability of class boundaries; can seem the supremely mature sophisticate (very evolved) and manifest a primeval “child-brain” (quite *devolved*) at the same time (p. 264); can be nearly all things on the continuum between a very earthy being bound by time and the unearthly demon (like Melmoth) surviving across centuries; and can of course become an animal – a wolf or bat – as easily as he can remorph into various human guises from different eras and cultures.

Threats of and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity, the child in the adult, timeless timeliness, and simultaneous evolution and devolution (especially after the middle of the nineteenth century): all these motifs, as possibly evil *and* desirable, circulate through Gothic works across the whole history of the form, differing mostly in degree of emphasis from example to example. Social and ideological tensions about all these “deviations” at different times thus find expression in the Gothic mode, which offers hyperbolic temptations toward these possibilities disguised in aberrant and regressive forms but also fashions means of othering them all so that standard, adult, middle-class identities can seem to stand out clearly against them. This remains the Gothic gambit, as several of our contributors will show, as much in the recent *Alien* films and Stephen King novels on demonic vampire-children as in *The Mysterious Mother*, *The Monk*, Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and (most obviously) *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, whether one refers to the original novels or more recent adaptations of them. The Gothic clearly exists, in part, to raise the possibility that all “abnormalities” we would divorce from ourselves are a part of ourselves, deeply and pervasively (hence frighteningly), even while it provides quasi-antiquated methods to help us place such “deviations” at a definite, though haunting, distance from us.

All that is linked to the Gothic as both high and low fiction, we have to say, raises the perpetual question of whether it is primarily a conservative or a revolutionary genre composed from other genres. Students of this form have long noted its first widely popular use during and after the French Revolution (1789–99) and have echoed the views of the Marquis de Sade, a frequent adapter of Gothic devices, who in 1807 saw this “genre [as] the inevitable

product of the revolutionary shocks with which the whole of Europe resounded” because it was able “to situate in the land of fantasies” the violent challenges to established orders that by now were “common knowledge” (Sade as quoted in Mulvey-Roberts, *Handbook to Gothic Literature*, p. 204). Certainly there are hints of similar revolutions in aspects of *The Monk*, where a tyrannical prioress is torn apart by a mob of oppressed common people (pp. 355–56), and in *Frankenstein*, where Victor’s refusal of responsibility for his working-class creature parallels his failure to see the value and equality of women, a problem already addressed by the author’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, in her occasionally Gothic *The Wrongs of Woman* (1797)⁸ and taken up a century later in Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” But there are just as many instances, we have to admit, of a conservative ideology that presents revolutionary horrors as the results of declines in social order or refusals of cultural proprieties and distinctions. Lewis’s novel, through its ultimately happy characters, finally condemns the licenses it presents as flawed challenges to valuable social hierarchies;⁹ Bram Stoker in *Dracula* unquestionably castigates all the crossings of boundaries that his count inspires and embodies, especially the “liberated” sexuality; and the *Frankenstein* films of the 1930s directed by James Whale constrain the creature’s suggestiveness greatly by giving him a criminal’s brain and making him finally the enemy of a Depression-era crowd of workers, who scapegoat their problems onto him and his creator, rather than those with corporate power, in an antiquated mill that they finally burn up along with much of the original novel (see Whale, *Frankenstein*).

Most often, though, Gothic works hesitate between the revolutionary and conservative, as when Ann Radcliffe allows her heroines independent property and ultimate freedom of choice within the fervent worship of their fathers and an avoidance of all direct political action, rebellious or reactionary. Partly because it comes from mixing discourses and postures so blatantly, often with their incompatibilities fully in view, the Gothic can both raise the sad specters of “othered” and oppressed behaviors, crossings of boundaries, and classes of people and finally arrange for the distancing and destruction of those figures or spaces into which the most troubling anomalies have been abjected by most of the middle class. No other form of writing or theatre is as insistent as Gothic on juxtaposing potential revolution and possible reaction – about gender, sexuality, race, class, the colonizers versus the colonized, the physical versus the metaphysical, and abnormal versus normal psychology – and leaving both extremes sharply before us and far less resolved than the conventional endings in most of these works claim them to be. In this respect, as the book’s chapters will show in proceeding through historical stages of the Gothic oscillation, writing, theatre, and films

of this kind enact and reflect the most intense and important ambivalences in modern western culture, if only in a distortion mirror that ostensibly places these quandaries long ago or far away from us.

These cultural functions are made possible, this book wants to show, by the ways the Gothic exaggerates its own extreme fictionality – and does so through long-lasting and creatively changing techniques. The hyperbolic *unreality*, even *surreality*, of Gothic fiction, as subject to parody and critique as it has been, is in every way essential to its capacity to abject cultural and psychological contradictions for modern readers to face or avoid. This is partly because, as Walpole reveals in his 1765 *Otranto* preface, the recipe for the “Gothic Story” from the start is to give “fancy” the “liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention” while still constraining the “agents” of a fiction within “the rules of probability” in *their* reactions and behaviors. In this statement as well as others, Walpole (as a fellow Whig in the British Parliament) is developing the specific sense of the “sublime” in several forms of art proposed by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; see Mishra, *Gothic Sublime*). Burke’s definition confines the sublime (traditionally the “grand style,” literally a “rising from beneath a threshold”) to “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger,” including the threat of “death” and the dissolution of the self, by “operat[ing] in a manner analogous to terror” so as to produce “the strongest emotion of which the mind is capable” (Burke, *Enquiry*, in Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents*, p. 112). Sublimity is thus aroused for Burke and then Walpole by linguistic or artistic expansions into “Vastness” or “Infinity” or even “notions of ghosts or goblins” (clearly expatiations into the boundless) because they terrifyingly threaten the annihilation of the self (*ibid.*, pp. 112, 114), but such stretchings of immediate credulity are nevertheless valuable for Burke (“according to the rules of probability”) because the “mortal agents” who observe those potentials are reacting as they should, as he sees them in a treatise focused primarily on the empirical psychology of emotional affect.

What most enables this seeming paradox, moreover, is Burke’s additional claim that life-threatening descriptions prompt an aesthetically worthwhile reaction because each one is so thoroughly artificial that “no idea of [genuine] danger [is really] connected with it” and the “mental powers” are beneficially expanded while “the pain and terror are modified so as not to be actually noxious” (Burke, *Enquiry*, in Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents*, pp. 120–21). The extremes that sublime or Gothic images point toward, in other words, are distanced and blunted enough by transformative representations to be pleasant in their terror. They not only lead to mixed but safe

reactions that can be called sublime, but they do so (as Freud might say) by “sublimating” what would be unacceptable to consciousness so as to transfigure that deathly otherness into the merest and most harmless figures, as when chemical sublimation turns a hard solid into an airy gas without passing it through the liquid stage.¹⁰ The Gothic mode begins, we have found, by employing the deliberate fictionality of the “terror sublime” to both draw us toward and protect us from virtually *all* that we might associate with the destruction of our presumed identities. The Gothic intermixture of the sublime with what Burke calls the unthreatening “beautiful” *and* with the comically bathetic and other incongruous elements only adds to the deliberately forced unreality that allows this mode to symbolize the threatening inconsistencies – including irrational desire and the immanence of death – in the personal and the political unconscious.

A related reason for this insistent artificiality, too, is the fact that its representations and even its Gothicism are so pointedly fake and counterfeit from the beginning. Walpole’s *Otranto* in its first edition not only fakes its being a translation of a manuscript by a Renaissance priest – a very ironic deception, given Walpole’s open opposition to Catholicism (see the first preface in Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, pp. 5–8) – but populates the actual tale with specters who are ghosts of what is *already artificial*: the gigantic, fragmented shade of an *effigy* on an underground tomb (p. 20) and the walking figure of a *portrait* which descends from the wall where its picture hangs (p. 26). As much as these sublime “ghosts or goblins” are signifiers of repressed primal crimes, one of which is in fact a “fictitious will” transferring Otranto to a false heir (p. 113), they play such roles as shades of figures; they are not just counterfeits but ghosts of counterfeits (see Hogle, “*Frankenstein*”). The Gothic is founded on a quasi-antiquarian use of symbols that are quite obviously signs only of older signs; by the time of the Gothic revival in architecture of the eighteenth century, there had already been “Gothic” revivals, even in the Middle Ages. The earlier signs had themselves been broken off from many of their past connections and now existed more as mere signifiers than as substantial points of reference or human bodies. Indeed, in using symbols from a highly Catholic past in an ultimately anti-Catholic way, as he did in his Gothicized house at Strawberry Hill (Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, pp. vii–viii) and Radcliffe, Lewis, and others proceeded to do after him, Walpole made his references to the distant past distinctly *hollowed-out* ones, allusions to what was largely empty as well as distant for him, even though Gothic relics could be effective for establishing a useful myth of Gothic ancestry that often proved to be as effective for class-climbing as it was ultimately counterfeit.¹¹ Such a use of the emptied past in ghosts of counterfeits has consequently allowed the *neo*-Gothic to be filled with

antiquated repositories into which modern quandaries can be projected and abjected simultaneously.

Even the use of the Gothic label, which has become even more common today compared to its very sporadic use to describe romantic fiction in the eighteenth century, turns out to be equally counterfeit, though quite usefully so, partly because *Gothic* as an aesthetic term has been counterfeit all along. It was first used by early Renaissance art historians in Italy to describe pointed-arch and castellated styles of medieval architecture, as well as medieval ways of life in general – but to do so in a pejorative way so as to establish the superiority of more recent neoclassic alternatives, because of which the designs of the immediate past were associated with supposedly barbaric Goths who had little to do with the actual buildings in question.¹²

Consequently, *Gothic* has long been a term used to project modern concerns into a deliberately vague, even fictionalized past. It has thus served over the years to refer, with equal fictionality, to Moors and other orientals (hence as a term of racial othering) and to uneducated members of the rural working classes, but also, by Walpole's time, to a mythic past of Anglo-Saxon freedom from foreign oppression connected with the Magna Carta that Whigs of the 1760s liked to use as a reference point for their anti-Tory arguments.¹³ Like the ghosts of counterfeits it employs, then, the Gothic is inherently connected to an exploitation of the emptied-out past to symbolize and disguise present concerns, including prejudices.

It has thus been an ideal vehicle throughout its history in which, as David Punter has put it, “the middle class displaces the hidden violence of present social structures, conjures them up again as past, and promptly falls under their spell” (*Literature of Terror*, II, 218–19). The Gothic and its ghosts of the already counterfeit can serve this cultural purpose *first* because the exploited relics from the past are emptied of much former content but *also* because such figures are unusually betwixt and between, like “Gothic” itself; they look back to a past existence which can never be recovered and so can be reconceived, yet they also look ahead to marketable recastings of old remnants in modern technologies (from Walpole's printing press at Strawberry Hill to the computer systems and software of today) in which what is already counterfeited can be transformed into a simulation among other simulations directed at a newer purpose and market. What better symbolic mechanism can there be, multidirectional as Gothic figures are, for abjecting betwixt and between, anomalous conditions where opposed positions of many kinds keep blurring into each other and threatening us with the dissolution of our normal cultural foundations for the identities we claim to possess? The Gothic has been and remains necessary to modern western culture because it allows us in ghostly disguises of blatantly counterfeit fictionality to confront

Introduction

the roots of our beings in sliding multiplicities (from life becoming death to genders mixing to fear becoming pleasure and more) and to define ourselves against these uncanny abjections, while also feeling attracted to them, all of this in a kind of cultural activity that as time passes can keep inventively changing its ghosts of counterfeits to address changing psychological and cultural longings and fears.

The chapters that follow seek to explain and exemplify the several stages and manifestations through which this cultural project has gone from the later eighteenth through the turn of the twentieth into the twenty-first century. There is not sufficient space for these experts on the Gothic to account for every form it has taken over 250 years, as chronological as our progression endeavors to be. Collectively, however, we hope to help our readers understand how and why the Gothic has developed as it has in different time periods and sometimes in different media. While each of us focuses on the Gothic of a specific era or location, we all attempt to answer the same fundamental questions. What were the historical, cultural, and aesthetic forces that shaped a certain stretch of the Gothic, and how and why did those forces interact as they did? What transformations took place in earlier versions of this form? What characterized these changes? What do these show about both the symbolic techniques and the cultural functions of the Gothic at particular times and in particular places? What longings, fears, and contradictions are most abjected into the Gothic at different times? What conceptions of human psychology do these variations manifest? How is the Gothic's essentially betwixt-and-between nature, including its slippage between conservative and revolutionary impulses or what is thought to be high as opposed to low culture, drawn in one set of directions or another at a given time or place – and why those results, as opposed to others, at that point? How do the gender, racial, generational, and national or colonial politics of particular times in western history get played out in these wildly fictional disguises? What are the relationships between pervasive cultural changes and stylistic transformations in the Gothic across its many forms? What happens to the Gothic's extreme artificiality (its ghosts of the already counterfeit) over time, particularly as a predominantly print culture gives way to film, video, and computer-based cultures? Do the cultural functions of the Gothic remain primarily the same or change radically or become what is finally a combination of both?

My introduction to this succession of studies has attempted an overview of this field that necessarily draws examples from mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic, since that is where the chapters most immediately after mine will focus their attention. This book ends with an essay

by Fred Botting designed to look backwards from the digitized present in a widely comparative way, much as I have primarily looked forward from the Gothic's beginnings in Walpolean fiction. Between these framing pieces, we offer accounts of how the Gothic has moved from one toward the other in the revolutionary *and* counterrevolutionary eighteenth century in England from the 1760s to the 1780s (E. J. Clery) to the explosively Gothic 1790s (Robert Miles); on the continent of Europe in France and Germany as the eighteenth century passed into the nineteenth (Terry Hale); in the so-called Romantic period in early nineteenth-century England, where the Gothic was both strongly resisted and often replayed (Michael Gamer); in Scotland and Ireland, the nearby soil of the conquered in the nineteenth century, where the politics of subjection and resistance altered the Gothic significantly for future use in several such places (David Punter); in the English theatre of the Romantic into the Victorian periods, where the theatricality inherent in Gothic fakery came more into its own on actual stages (Jeffrey N. Cox); in the Victorian prose Gothic of Britain visible in a wide range of novels and short stories with surprisingly various political leanings and placements of women (Alison Milbank); in the developing United States, where the Gothic proved amazingly right for symbolizing the contradictions in a supposedly new world still drawn by the old (Eric Savoy); in the English Gothic of the *fin du siècle* and the early twentieth century, as this pliable mode addressed the most wrenching series of cultural changes in its history (Kelly Hurley); in the filmed Gothic, which accelerated rapidly in post-1930 America and later in Europe to offer alternative techniques of representation to deal with numerous post-Depression hopes and fears (Misha Kavka); in a much transformed Gothic with cross-racial ingredients in what used to be distant colonies of European countries, here exemplified most by the Caribbean (Lizabeth Paravisani-Gebert); and in the wide range of contemporary Gothic horror in the west after the Second World War, from novels to films to television, in which growing audiences came to confront, in new kinds of disguise, the traumas peculiar to postmodern life and our ways of protecting ourselves from them even as we continue to fear them (Steven Bruhm).

In each of these accounts, our readers will find, the purveyors and receivers of Gothic fictions all face different versions of a similar choice in how they construct or respond to this highly exaggerated, and still controversial, range of fictions. Because of the Gothic's conservative leanings and its capacities for disguising its abjections in highly displaced locations and specters, on the one hand, authors and audiences can choose approaches that emphasize surface shock value, luridness of setting, exoticism of character, and a posture of convenient middle distance from these that both admits their attractions and condemns their excesses in the end, claiming "that's entertainment!"

On the other hand, since the Gothic also serves to symbolize our struggles and ambivalences over how dominant categorizations of people, things, and events can be blurred together and so threaten our convenient, but repressive thought patterns, its creators and onlookers have the opportunity to make Gothic show us our cultural and psychological selves and conditions, in their actual multiplicity, in ways that other aesthetic forms cannot manage as forcefully or with such wide public appeal. Such self-exposures can create occasions for us to reassess our standard oppositions and distinctions – and thus our prejudices – at which point Gothic can activate its revolutionary and boundary-changing impulses and lead us to dissolve some of the rigidities and their otherings of people by which we live and from which much of the Gothic takes its shape. We are always poised on the fulcrum of this choice when we read or consider Gothic fictions: do we let them mainly protect and justify us as we are (which most of them can, if we seek that through them) or do we let them arouse us to reconsider and critique the conventional norms of western middle-class culture, which can confront disguised challenges to them in the Gothic (if we let it) more vividly than anywhere else? Will the fear that Gothic works to arouse keep us from facing the longings and anomalies behind those terrors that the Gothic also depicts? These chapters do not finally answer that question, but they do collectively pose it in analyzing key examples of the Gothic's tempestuous history, which, we now see, is intimately bound up with the history of modern western culture over the last three centuries.

NOTES

- 1 See Joseph Wiesenfarth, *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 41–160; Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 173–231; Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and especially Alison Milbank, both *Daughters of the House* (London: Macmillan, 1992) and her chapter in this volume.
- 2 On the satirizing of Gothic, see E. J. Clery and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: a Sourcebook, 1700–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 201–22, and Roxana Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the Nineteenth-Century Stage* (Bowling Green, OH: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 164–78.
- 3 Here I gratefully parallel the attempt to distinguish the *Gothic* tale clearly from other kinds of ghost stories in Chris Baldick, ed., *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. xi–xxiii.
- 4 These extremes of the Gothic were first defined theoretically in Ann Radcliffe's posthumously published "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents*, pp. 163–72), which appeared in 1826 first in the *New Monthly*

- Magazine* and then as a preface to her posthumous novel, *Gaston de Blondville*. See also *ibid.*, pp. 168–71. The same distinctions were best reinvented for recent critical discussion in the 1969 essay by Robert Hume.
- 5 The highly pre-Freudian nature of Poe's work was established most forcefully by Marie Bonaparte in *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1933), trans. John Rodker, introduced by Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth, 1949). The presagings of psychoanalysis in nineteenth-century French fiction have been discussed in Joan Kessler, *Demons of the Night: Tales of the Fantastic, Madness and the Supernatural from Nineteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. xi–li.
 - 6 See the chapters by Paul O'Flinn, Chris Baldick, Anne K. Mellor, Margaret Homans, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *New Casebooks: Frankenstein*, ed. Fred Botting (London: Macmillan, 1995).
 - 7 For the best histories of the female Gothic, see Julianne Fleenor, ed., *The Female Gothic* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983); Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Eugenia DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: a Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: a Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Susan Wolstenholme, *Gothic (Re)visions: Writing Women as Readers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Diane Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988); and Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) (in recommended order of reading).
 - 8 See Wollstonecraft's *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 75–81.
 - 9 See Daniel P. Watkins, "Social Hierarchy in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*," *Studies in the Novel* 18 (1986): 115–24.
 - 10 This definition of sublimation is indebted to Stuart Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 33–49.
 - 11 See Mark Madoff, "The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 8 (1979): 337–50. My sense of the counterfeit is also heavily indebted to Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993), especially pp. 50–61.
 - 12 Here I am beholden to pp. 259–60 of Paul Frankl's, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) a book which provides a definitive genealogy of *Gothic* as an aesthetic term.
 - 13 See Madoff, "Useful Myth"; Samuel Klinger, *The Goths in England: a Study in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); Clery in this volume; and Susie I. Tucker, *Protean Shape: a Study in Eighteenth-Century Vocabulary* (London: Athlone Press, 1967), pp. 149–55.